

they were inherited by the offspring. Can acquired peculiarities become innate, or do they differ from peculiarities which arise spontaneously in not being transmissible to the next generation? This question introduces us to the most controversial of biological questions. It is very strongly maintained by an influential school of thought that acquired characters are not heritable, that offspring are not innately affected by the experiences of their parents (unless these have injured the reproductive organs), and have no inborn tendency to reproduce any change of colour, form, or habit which their parents may have contracted. This conclusion is certainly supported by a mass of negative evidence, showing that in particular cases peculiarities of form or habit contracted by parents are not passed on to their children. Circumcision has been practised by some races from remote antiquity without producing any hereditary results. It is indeed maintained by Dr. August Weismann, and other great authorities, that the reproductive organs are in origin and in functioning quite distinct from the body of sense and motion, and that bodily experiences can therefore have no effect upon the cells which these organs produce. But this theory assumes that impulses arise from organs, instead of organs from impulses; and it is based upon grounds which are in great measure conjectural. Its opponents have collected a large

number of facts  
which indicate that in some cases  
acquired  
peculiarities have actually been  
inherited. In  
this uncertainty we may again  
remember that  
Life does not limit itself to a single line  
of action.  
and that it may in some cases permit  
what in  
other cases it refuses. It does not  
follow that  
acquired characters never become  
innate because  
it is proved that they very  
frequently do not